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How a 7-year-old boy's death under truck brought Behala Chowrasta to a standstill

Mobs torch vehicles, attack traffic police post, residents debate over fixing blame

Jaismita Alexander | Published 04.08.23, 07:04 PM

(From left) A photograph of Souranil Sarkar, the killer truck apprehended on Kona Expressway and the school boy's distraught mother clings to his school bag

My Kolkata

Shards of glass lay scattered over a 750-metre stretch of Diamond Harbour Road on Friday morning. Damaged and burnt vehicles had been towed away and dumped near Behala Chowrasta. Officers of the special task force were on patrol and senior officers of Kolkata Traffic Police could be spotted as well.

Hours earlier, Class II student Souranil Sarkar had been crushed under the wheels of a truck on his way to Barisha High School, where he was to appear for his physical education examination. The boy's father, is in the hospital battling critical injuries. Souranil would have celebrated his ninth birthday on August 25, when he wished to go to Prinsep Ghat with his parents and eat out at a restaurant.

(Clockwise from top left) A guardian escorts his ward near the accident spot, shards of glass cover the mishap spot, a vandalised goods vehicle and burnt down two-wheelers near Behala Chowrasta

Jaismita Alexander

"The boy was crossing DH Road when we heard a screeching noise and after a moment of silence, everyone started screaming for help. A brick-laden truck had run him over. The father was alive but badly injured. I heard he died in hospital," a witness to the accident said.

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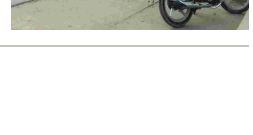

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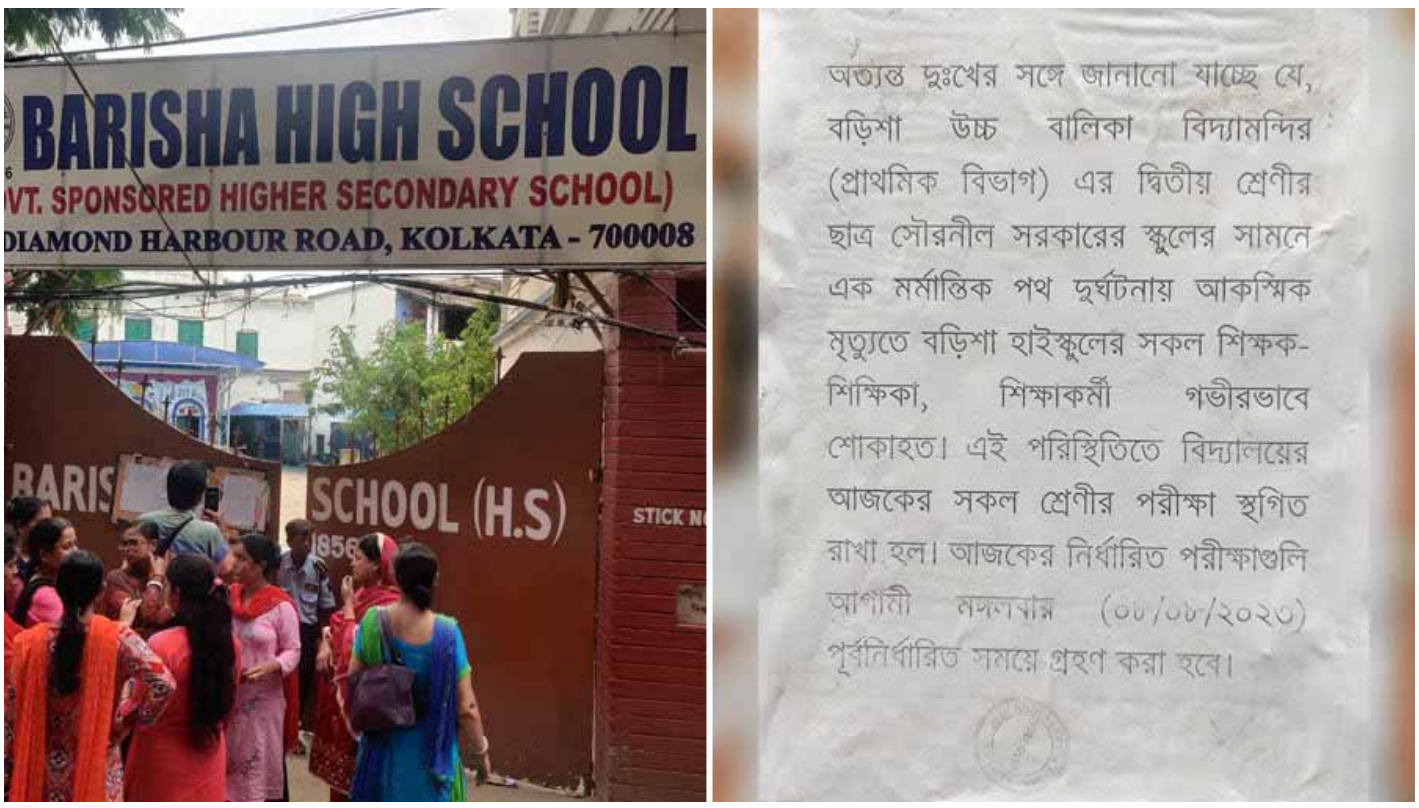
The accident angered local residents who allegedly attacked a police kiosk and also police vehicles. Traffic was paralysed and vehicles had to take a detour through James Long Sarani, which runs parallel to the prime artery, and many other lanes and bylanes.

The truck was caught from Kona Expressway near Santragachhi, 13km away from the accident spot.

I came to know about the accident from a neighbour's text message early in the morning. "Aaj amar chheler school e Class 2 er bachha Baba somet accident e mara gechhe. Uttal Chowrasta.. ki pathetic bol…Amar chhele eto bhoy peye geche schoole jabe bole just berochhilam tokhoni… (A boy studying in Class II at my son's school and his father have been killed in an accident. There seems to be trouble at Chowrasta. My child is afraid to go to school, we just got the news while leaving home)," the message read.



Guardians wait to pick up their wards at Barisha High School where Souranil Sarkar studied and (right) a notice postponing all exams scheduled for Friday to next Tuesday citing the tragic accident at Chowrasta

Jaismita Alexander

Assuming that things would have settled down, I left home for work around 10am as I had an appointment to keep. I was walking down to the main (Diamond Harbour) road when I came across a shopkeeper I know by face. He told me that he had just crossed Chowrasta (the crossing) by foot to open his shop on James Long Sarani. Auto drivers and the cycle-rickshaw pullers had shifted their vehicles to James Long Sarani, after alleged lathicharge by Rapid Action Force and bursting of teargas shells.

Bits of glass lay scattered on the road. Two-wheelers, goods vehicles, cars and buses that had been attacked by angry protesters lay dumped near the Chowrasta branch of a private bank. Twisted fans and broken plastic chairs bore testimony to the attack on the police kiosk. The special task force had been deployed and senior officers of Kolkata Traffic Police, including deputy commissioner of police (DCP), traffic, Alok Sanyal, were taking a lowdown of the situation since morning.

I heard vendors and shopkeepers debating over whose fault had caused the accident. Shopkeepers complained about the absence of traffic police or traffic volunteers early in the morning.

Local residents I spoke to blamed the accident on police apathy. “The Behala Chowrasta crossing on Diamond Harbour Road is an accident-prone area. Traffic police fail to manage the chaos during office hours. Daily commuters like us witness small accidents frequently. But today’s accident and whatever happened in its aftermath has jolted us. We are all shocked. If it were a child and his father today, tomorrow it could be anyone from my family too,” said Anjali Das, a local resident.

(Clockwise from top left) Passers-by look at the ashes of burnt down vehicles, a van of the Specialised Force of Kolkata Police at Chowrasta, an abandoned footwear bears testimony to the clash between the mob and security forces and a school boy waits for public transport hours later
Jaismita Alexander

construction force pedestrians to walk on the road. Autos and cycle-rickshaws add to the already congested road. Absence of police personnel in the early morning hours is also a problem. Traffic police usually join duty after 9.30am,” a sub-inspector at Behala police station said on request of anonymity.

The streets remained deserted until about noon, when classes got over at Barisha High School. I walked down to the school but found the gates shut. The guard refused to let me meet the principal.

Additional reporting by Bishwabijoy Mitra

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